

PROSPECT HILL FORGE: Michael Bergman and Carl West

A bit of history

For a long time, we have had the dream of building an artist community with facilities to support theater, dance, music and the visual arts, in particular the 'fire arts': Blacksmithing, Ceramics, and Glassblowing for example.

The search for such a place in the Boson area proved frustrating and expensive and the idea was shelved.

In the Spring of '06 Mike approached a company in Waltham and asked about doing a blacksmithing demonstration or class in its facility. They politely declined the opportunity on account of the ludicrousness of such an idea, but suggested that the light industrial space that was for lease right next door might be an ideal location for such an activity.

We leased the space.

We officially opened Prospect Hill Forge on May 1, 2007 (after about a year of learning to deal with state and local bureaucracy and regulation). Our goal was to create a place where people could learn and practice blacksmithing. We have four 'work stations'; each has a coal forge, a bench, a blacksmith's vise, a machinist's vise, a collection of hammers, punches, chisels, measuring tools... just about everything that's needed. Each forge is a little different in construction. Some have electric blowers, some have hand-powered blowers, some are 'official' old-style made-for-the-purpose forges, others were hand-made right here in the smithy.

Philosophy

We feel that it is important that our students understand that there is no one way to pursue this craft and there is no one perfect set of tools that will handle all jobs. A forge can be anything from a couple of holes in the ground and a flap of goat-skin to a carefully fitted induction coil, or anything inbetween.

Instructor

Carl West



Michael Bergman

Mr. West discovered smithing in the mid-70's and has been doing it off and on since. "Whenever my landlord has allowed it, I've had a forge set up." He earned a BFA in Sculpture at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. During those summers he worked with Warren Swanson, a blacksmith in West Newfield, Maine. "I learned a lot with Warren: how to run a fire, how the metal moves under the hammer, how to make a hundred fireplace pokers in a day..." Since then he has made armor for medieval recreationists, been a graphic artist and programmer, and repaired watches and jewelry. "The whole time I was doing that other stuff," says West, "the hot iron kept calling to me. It's good to get back to the hammer and be sharing the joys of blacksmithing with others."

Mr. Bergman has been working with metal since he started casting lead soldiers as a child. Since then his interests have spread from casting in various metals to blacksmithing, to machine tools, and to woodworking. Using mostly traditional techniques and tools, he builds medieval furniture, and restores 19th century furniture. "Sometimes it's surprising just how efficiently traditional techniques work with traditional tools. Often better than attempting the same techniques with modern tools." Mr. Bergman's interests come together in the need to design and construct his own woodworking tools, hence his interest in blacksmithing.